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Bill Shorten "Constitutional recognition is only the first step"

Opinion

Recognition is a force that can unite Australia

KEN WYATT and LINDA BURNEY, Herald Sun

July 14, 2016 9:00pm

 Subscriber only

AUSTRALIA has just been through a long election campaign and the result, as we all know, was very close. The next Parliament looks challenging. Large crossbenches will mean a lot of negotiating.

That's fine, because it's the Parliament Australians voted for. In the end, voters get to choose.

We are two of the members privileged to represent our communities in that Parliament. We happen to be from opposing political parties but you might be relieved to know we respect each other and don't disagree on everything.



📷 Labor federal Barton MP Linda Burney. Picture: AFP



📷 Liberal federal Hasluck MP Ken Wyatt. Picture: Supplied

As the dust settles on a tough campaign, it's timely to reflect on a few things that can get lost in the ruckus.

The first is just how precious our votes are. It's common lately to hear people express impatience with the whole process or even resent having to vote. Many are heartily sick of the campaigning come election day. Fair enough, but we should never forget how lucky we are to be able to make this vital choice.

All over the world there are millions of people who would give a lot for this simple freedom — the right to choose their own government.

However you voted, we both believe you should value your vote highly and celebrate our peaceful democratic process in which everyone gets a say.

There's a second thing we'd like to highlight. When we take our seats in Canberra, we'll be joining a record number of colleagues from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Besides us, there will be Malarndirri McCarthy, Patrick Dodson, Jacqui Lambie and, hopefully, Joanna Lindgren.

It is really something to celebrate, not least because it is entirely an action of the Australian

electorate. Voters elected us. So thank you.

And that brings us to a third cause for reflection. After eight weeks of hard-fought politics, it's easy to get the feeling that the parties can't agree on anything. Well, we're here to tell you, that's not true.



📷 Ken Wyatt and Linda Burney will be joining a record number of colleagues from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in the federal Australian Parliament.

All the mainstream parties and most independents and minor parties are united in supporting a Yes vote in a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in our national Constitution.

When it was written, it envisaged Australia only as a European migrant society. Hundreds of different Indigenous peoples, with distinct languages and cultures, lived here and cared for the country for tens of thousands of years.

The Constitution virtually ignored them. It even has sections that allow for discrimination based on race. The only way to fix that is by voting in a referendum to change it.

In one important way, we two parliamentarians actually represent the whole Australian political system.

It's simply this: like many Australians we come from opposing sides of politics, we disagree (sometimes passionately) on many issues, but, like Australia itself, the things that unite us are more important than the things that divide us.

Right now another vote is the last thing most of us want to think about. Even so, we are very hopeful that in the next year or so we'll all vote again — this time in a referendum. On that day, please cast your vote to recognise the First Australians in our Constitution.

This is not just about Indigenous Australians, it's about Australian history — it belongs to all of us. The Constitution is modern Australia's birth certificate — it simply has to tell the truth.

Elections come and go, but Indigenous Australians have been here, in terms of human history, essentially forever. We should all be proud of that. We should celebrate it. We should use our precious votes to recognise it.

Ken Wyatt is the Liberal member for Hasluck in WA. Linda Burney is the Labor member for Barton in NSW.



📷 Indigenous journalist Stan Grant holds the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginals) 1967 document and the 1900 Australian Constitution at the National Archives in Canberra ahead of Constitution Day earlier this month. Picture: Ray Strange